

# Congressional Progressive Caucus

## 2021 In Review

**T**he first year of the 117th Congress was a transformative one for the Progressive Caucus. The membership was the largest in CPC history, at 98 House members. It was the first year since the adoption of new bylaws and a new structure designed to allow the Caucus to be as effective as possible: to respond nimbly to changing circumstances, effectively channel the voices of the progressive movement in Congress, and vote as a bloc. Despite the immense challenges of 2021 — the pandemic and economic recession, the January 6 insurrection and its aftermath, and the limits of a 50/50 U.S. Senate and the filibuster — the CPC did exactly that.

Progressives in Congress and in the movement worked for years to advance policies in service of gender, racial, and economic justice — and in 2021, we saw that effort yield real results. From the House passing policing reform legislation and the first appropriations bill without the Hyde Amendment in decades, to ensuring environmental justice provisions in the Build Back Better Act with 40 percent of funding allocated to frontline communities, it's clear that progressives have succeeded in significantly shifting the landscape of congressional action further toward a justice-oriented lens.



*The Congressional Progressive Caucus membership of the 117th Congress*

# Combatting the COVID-19 Crisis

When the new Congress began in January, it faced the most urgent and devastating challenge in recent decades: COVID-19. The pandemic exposed longstanding inequalities and created acute crises, both requiring congressional action.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus worked hard to ensure that the funding package the House passed was as bold as it needed to be, maintained the income thresholds for survival checks, and included essential funding for housing, utilities, and an expanded Child Tax Credit. The CPC also ensured inclusion of a \$15 minimum wage in the House plan, although it was ultimately rejected by the Senate. Thanks to progressives' advocacy, the American Rescue Plan retained the core bold, progressive elements originally proposed by President Biden. As 24 million Americans went hungry and 40 million struggled to stay in their homes, the package provided essential aid to put food on the table, reopen schools, ensure access to childcare, and keep small businesses afloat. The bill kickstarted an economic recovery that has seen wages rise, millions of jobs created, and child poverty reduced by half and hunger by a third, even as the pandemic has continued.

Throughout the American Rescue Plan negotiations and in the months that followed, progressives played a leading role in keeping millions in their homes. Using her seat as chair of the Financial Services Committee, Representative Maxine Waters (CA-43) authored provisions that protected homeowners and renters from foreclosures and eviction during the mass layoffs, reduced working hours, and economic recession. Beginning in January, Reps. Ayanna Pressley (MA-07) and Jimmy Gomez (CA-34) [led](#) a group of 63 lawmakers asking the incoming Biden administration to prioritize housing security. [In May](#), Rep. Cori Bush (MO-01) led members in asking the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) directly to extend and strengthen the eviction moratorium. In June, Reps. Pressley, Gomez, and Bush led another [letter](#) to President Biden and the CDC, and Reps. Pressley and CPC Whip Ilhan Omar (MN-05) [re-introduced](#) legislation to institute a nationwide cancellation of rents and mortgage payments for the duration of the pandemic. When the federal moratorium was scheduled to expire on August 1, progressives [raised the alarm](#), and Chair Waters met with Treasury Secretary Yellen to discuss disbursement of rental assistance funds to state and local governments, and authored legislation to extend the protections.

This advocacy culminated in a historic direct action led by Rep. Bush, who spent five days on the Capitol steps, joined by many of her CPC colleagues, to galvanize national attention and call on Washington to govern with moral clarity. As a result, the White House and the CDC for issued a [new](#) short-term eviction moratorium, buying time for states and cities to distribute the \$46 billion in rental assistance allocated by Congress.

Progressives were also instrumental in securing the [extension](#) of the student loan pause, which the Biden Administration announced in December, under the leadership of Reps. Pressley, [Omar](#), and [Alma Adams](#) (NC-12), and in partnership with Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY).

## Passing Progressive Legislation

In the House of Representatives, CPC members led much of the 2021 legislation to passage, including some of the most high-profile victories of the Democratic majority in the lower chamber. These bills represented longstanding progressive and Democratic priorities, as well as essential corrective work to the abuses of the Trump administration.

Under the leadership of D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, the House passed D.C. statehood legislation, which would finally grant equal representation to the 700,000 residents of the District. Rep. David Cicilline (RI-01) introduced and led passage of the [Equality Act](#), another key bill for the CPC, to create nationwide, consistent, explicit protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, and public spaces and services like stores, hotels, and more.

Sponsored by Rep. Judy Chu (CA-27), the House passed The National Origin-Based Anti-discrimination for Nonimmigrants [\(NO BAN\) Act](#), which would set standards to ensure a president can no longer issue discriminatory immigration laws like the Muslim Ban, as well as CPC Chair Pramila Jayapal (WA-07)'s [Access to Counsel Act](#), to ensure that U.S. citizens, green card holders, and other individuals with legal status are able to consult with an attorney, relative, or other interested party to seek assistance if they are detained by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) for more than an hour at ports of entry, including airports. Rep. Lucille Royal-Allard (CA-40) sponsored the House-passed [Dream and Promise Act](#)

to create a roadmap to citizenship for Dreamers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders, and Rep. Zoe Lofgren (CA-19)'s Farm Workforce Modernization Act, to do the same for farmworkers.

Rep. Karen Bass (CA-37) introduced and led House passage of the [George Floyd Justice in Policing Act](#), that would take significant steps to hold law enforcement officers accountable for abuse and create national standards for police conduct. Under the leadership of Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (TX-18), the House of Representatives took a historic step to [advance H.R. 40 to the floor](#), legislation that would create a commission to study reparations for the descendants of slavery.

CPC members comprised the majority of original cosponsors and have been among the most vocal champions of the Protecting the Right to Organize ([PRO Act](#)), the most significant workers' rights legislation of the 21st century. The bill would make it easier for workers to join unions, institute steeper penalties for employers who violate workers' rights, and empower unions in negotiation. Progressives rallied support for the [For the People Act](#), critical federal intervention to curb partisan gerrymandering and voter suppression sweeping state legislatures, and make long-needed reforms to campaign finance laws, as well as the [John Lewis Voting Rights Act](#) and the Freedom to Vote Act, bills to restore voting rights gutted by the Supreme Court in 2013.

All this was before the CPC ensured House passage of the most progressive, expansive legislation in decades: the [Build Back Better Act](#). The Caucus entered the negotiations around the bill with a clear [vision](#): the legislation should deliver immediate, tangible change in the lives of working people, and should do so by investing significantly in climate action, affordable housing, health care, immigration provisions, and the care economy. Members [advocated](#) with Congressional Leadership for a comprehensive scope, a package size that would meet the needs of the moment, and a process that would deliver for the American people as quickly as possible. During the committee process, CPC members helped write generational policy: a Civilian Climate Corps to create millions of green jobs in communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis, the largest-ever federal housing investment, universal preschool in the largest expansion of public education since the creation of the K-12 system, and provisions to provide Dreamers, TPS holders, farmworkers, and other essential workers a roadmap to citizenship. Working alongside allies, progressives on the Education and Labor Committee passed the first-ever universal child care program, where no family would pay more than seven percent of their income. Thanks to CPC members' work, the House of Representatives passed a transformational bill that would deliver real, long overdue and urgently needed results to working people.



# Advocating for Progressive Governance

**A**t the beginning of the Biden administration, the CPC saw an opportunity not only for a Democratic administration, but one driven by progressive values and goals. The Caucus made a number of recommendations to the administration, advocating for progressives who could lead with working people, people of color, and those who are underserved in mind, and implement policies that will change lives. Many of those recommendations were implemented across the executive branch, in both cabinet and sub-cabinet roles. As a result, the Biden administration is staffed with progressive champions across departments.

## **The Progressive Caucus' advocacy was key in the appointments and confirmations of:**

- Secretary Deb Haaland, Department of the Interior
- Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, Department of Homeland Security
- Julie Su, Deputy Secretary, Department of Labor
- Vanita Gupta, Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice
- Jonathan Kanter, Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice Anti-Trust Division
- Graham Steele, Assistant Secretary, Treasury Department
- Thea Lee, Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs, Department of Labor
- Rohit Chopra, Director, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
- Lina Khan, Commissioner, Federal Trade Commission
- Ur Jaddou, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

The CPC continually worked toward the executive branch using its power for progressive policymaking, [advocating](#) the administration take action to combat the global pandemic and public health inequity by producing and releasing vaccine doses, use U.S. influence to encourage T.R.I.P.S. waivers with the World Trade Organization, and increased Special Drawing Rights with the International Monetary Fund. In advance of the President's first summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the CPC [advocated](#) policies to reduce tensions in areas of dispute and cooperate on areas of global importance such as arms control to prevent a new nuclear arms race, addressing climate change, combating violent extremism, reducing cyber threats to national economies and infrastructure, and reducing global economic inequality.

# Supporting Member Offices

**T**he Progressive Caucus staff provided continual support for CPC member offices, including increased capacity on communications messaging, strategy, and execution; and on policy analysis and legislative strategy. The Caucus provided regular opportunities for information-sharing, learning, and community among staff; coalition-building between members, staff, and partners; and facilitated key relationship building and advocacy moments for members and administration officials.

## **The Progressive Caucus Facilitated Meetings for Members and Staff With:**

- Adam Jentleson, author of Kill Switch on Filibuster Reform
- Anat Shenker-Orsorio, communications strategist
- Ann Clancy of Indivisible, Leah Stokes of Evergreen Action, and Lauren Maunus of Sunrise Movement, Climate Action Experts
- Economists Rakeen Mabud, Lauren Melodia, and Josh Bivens
- Heidi Shierholz, Economic Policy Institute
- House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (MD-05)
- Jane Fonda
- Jared Bernstein, President's Council of Economic Advisors
- Louis Terrell, Director, White House Office of Legislative Affairs
- Peter Maybarduk, Access to Medicines Director at Public Citizen
- Representatives Matt Cartwright (PA-08), Debbie Dingell (MI-12), Ted Lieu (CA-33), and Joe Negue (CO-02), co-chairs, Democratic Policy and Communications Committee
- Representative Peter Defazio (OR-04), chair, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
- Representative Richard Neal (MA-01), chair, House Ways and Means Committee
- Representative John Sarbanes (MD-03)
- Representative Adam Smith (WA-09), chair, House Armed Services Committee
- Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona
- Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm
- Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra
- Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fudge
- Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh
- Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg
- SEIU President Mary Kay Henry
- Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), chair, Senate Budget Committee
- Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY)
- Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)
- Senator Tina Smith (D-MN)
- Speaker Nancy Pelosi (CA-12)
- Surgeon General Vivek Murthy
- Tyler Moran, Special Assistant to the President for Immigration, Domestic Policy Council
- Ur Jaddou, director, USCIS